NAME _____ DATE _____ CLASS _____

Economics of History Activity

networks

The First Chinese Empires

Qin Shihuangdi Unifies the Economy

Between 771 B.C. and 221 B.C., China was divided into many small feudal states. One of those feudal states was the Qin, from which the name China was derived. One of the most martial of the feudal states, the Qin slowly began conquering its surrounding states, organizing them into a major power.

Economics Terms to Know

currency money (as coins and bills) that is in circulation as a medium of exchange

taxes amounts of money that businesses and individuals are required to pay the government to support government services

In 246 B.C., Zhao Zheng formally ascended the throne of Qin at the age of 13. By then, Qin was the most powerful state, well on its way to uniting the Chinese empire under one rule. By 221 B.C., China was united for the first time, under the rule of Zheng, who immediately proclaimed himself Qin Shihuangdi ("First Sovereign Emperor of Qin"), claiming that his empire would last "10,000 generations." As it turned out, he was the only ruler in his dynasty, which was overthrown soon after his death. Even so, the basic administrative system that he established would be followed in China for the next 2,000 years. What did he do that was so valuable, and why was his dynasty overthrown?

As emperor, Qin Shihuangdi reformed the government by establishing a centralized administration. He issued orders for standardization of weights, measures, the axle lengths of carts, the width of highways, the written language, and the laws. He created a single monetary system, standardizing **currency** throughout the empire. He initiated the construction of a network of roads and canals, and he had fortresses along the north border linked to form the Great Wall. To pay for all these projects, he increased **taxes**, which did not strengthen his popularity among his subjects.

Higher taxation was not the only thing that angered the masses. In 213 B.C., Qin Shihuangdi ordered all books burned except for those dealing with such utilitarian subjects as agriculture, medicine, or historical records of Qin. He died in 210 B.C., and by 206 B.C. the Qin dynasty was replaced by the Han.

Applying Economics to History

1. **Explaining** Explain how Qin Shihuangdi worked to unify China economically.

_____

_____

2. **Analyzing** What are the advantages of using a standard currency within an empire?

_____

_____

_____

Copyright © The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. Permission is granted to reproduce for classroom use.